



NEWS

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Secretary Norton Presents a Report to President Bush On Commitment to Improve National Park System

Interior Secretary Gale A. Norton today presented President Bush a report outlining the significant progress the department has made in meeting his commitment to ensure the proper care of our national parks, including 900 repair and rehabilitation projects in the past two years and the first-ever inventory and condition assessment of all park facilities.

"Like the millions of Americans who will visit them this summer, President Bush has a deep love and appreciation of our national parks," Norton said. "I am proud to give him this report that shows the good work the Interior Department is doing to safeguard these treasures and provide a better experience for visitors."

The 36-page report titled, "Partnering and Managing for Excellence", gives a snapshot of the current state of the park system and outlines steps the National Park Service will take over the next two years to improve and strengthen the management and stewardship of our parks.

From 2002 through 2004, the president's budgets have provided nearly \$2.9 billion to help reduce a \$4.9 billion maintenance and repair backlog in the park system. During his term, the National Park Service has undertaken 60 fire safety projects, 140 general building rehabilitation projects, 186 upgrades and repairs to water, wastewater, and sewer facilities, as well as many other projects. In addition, the Service is undertaking 500 maintenance and repair projects in Fiscal Year 2003.

To prevent future backlogs, the president has more than doubled funding for regular upkeep of park facilities, from \$24 million in FY 2000 to \$56 million for FY 2004, as part of his maintenance backlog initiative.

The National Park Service also is working to improve the condition of park roads. In 2001, just 35 percent of park roads were in good condition. Under a new transportation bill, the president proposes to provide funding to reach a goal of more than 80 percent of park roads in good or excellent condition.

"The Park System has suffered from neglect for many years but we are changing that," Norton said. "We are working with our states, local governments, conservation groups, private citizens and others to ensure that our parks continue to be the finest in the world, providing millions of people safe, enjoyable and inspiring visits."

The document also reports that the National Park System is developing a detailed inventory of the 7,500 facilities located at the nation's 388 parks. For the first time ever, park managers will have a system of prioritizing work at these facilities, so they can put budget resources in the places that will do the most good.

"Our parks are no different from a home in that they need continual maintenance, and priorities must be established and followed," Norton said. "If your roof is leaking, it is important

to fix it before you replace your old carpet with a new one. Parks need the same well-planned approach.”

Other highlights of the report include:

- The National Park Service is broadening opportunities for Americans to enjoy their national and local parks by assisting states, local governments and the private sector in creating or protecting more than 3,300 miles of trails, 1,500 miles of river corridor and 127,000 acres of park lands, wildlife habitat and open space.
- Building upon the USA Freedom Corps initiative for volunteers, Secretary Norton re-launched the “Take Pride in America” program, which promotes volunteerism in parks and other public lands. Over the past two years, more than 125,000 volunteers have contributed nine million hours of service in national parks, valued at \$140 million.
- The National Park Service is a key participant in the Preserve America initiative, announced by First Lady Laura Bush earlier this year. The report details the agency’s role as the nation’s premier federal historic preservation agency, in sustainable use and preservation of cultural and natural heritage sites.
- The report details how the NPS has infused its operations with partnerships in all areas of management and at all levels of the organization to help leverage and provide additional resources, encourage diversity of visitors and employees, link with communities and education institutions and facilitate a seamless nationwide network of parks and open spaces. A prime example is the Golden Gate National Recreation Area’s partnership with the Golden Gate National Park Conservancy. Since its inception in 1981, the association has contributed over \$65 million to support the park.
- A multiyear program, the Natural Resource Challenge, is providing scientific information, expertise and tools to strengthen NPS stewardship of the nation’s natural heritage. Over just three years, the president’s commitment to the Natural Resource Challenge brought the program more than \$104 million in additional funds. Exotic Plant Management Teams are a hallmark example of the Natural Resources Challenge. Nine teams currently assist 95 parks, with the Park Service establishing six new teams in FY 2003.
- The Park Service is an active partner with other agencies in implementing the National Fire Plan and the president’s Healthy Forests Initiative. In 2001 and 2002, the agency treated over 250,000 acres for hazardous fuel reduction. Through the Rural Fire Assistance Program, it assisted 664 small fire departments with fire training, personal protective gear, and other equipment, totaling almost \$6 million in the last two years.

Editor’s Note: Copies of the report and additional materials may be accessed and downloaded by visiting www.nps.gov/accompreport2003/.